# Schwarz-Weiß

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Berlin, 1984. One from East, one from West. Like black and white, they meet under improbable circumstances.

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*Berlin 1984.*

Ryuko had always been a bit rebellious, but this was taking it to a completely different level. Sneaking out of her surrogate family's home was one thing, but sneaking across an international border? Well, that was something else entirely. But, with the help of some forged documents purporting a supposed "family illness" and the help of a sympathetic border guard, she had managed to make it out of East Berlin, if only for the night.

"Be back before 2, and don't be late." He had said with a wink.

Ryuko had sighed with relief, thanking him profusely before making her way into a new world, clutching her old Canon F1 camera bundled under her long coat. God knows she wouldn't be leaving without some pictures.

It hadn't taken her long to stumble across a party filled with college students around her age, spilling out of a low-level duplex and into the street in front. Ryuko was grateful when the hosts drunkenly welcomed her in out of the cold, eyeing the drab coat she hung with no small amount of confusion, the plain clothes even more so. She doubted their confusion was anywhere near hers as she was assaulted by music, furniture and decorations altogether foreign to the stark and depressing nature of East Berlin.

It had all led her to this moment, cigarette dangling from her lower lip as she took infrequent sips from some unkown concoction and examined the exquisite black and white photography hanging on the wall. The composition was flawless, and the colorless nature of the photos seemed familiar to her, and yet altogether foreign. Ryuko was so engrossed, in fact, that she almost didn't hear a husky voice speak up from behind her.

"Sie sind sehr schön, ja?"

Ryuko turned with a little too much force, almost flinging the cigarette from her mouth before catching it with one hand and eliciting a lilting giggle from the girl opposite her, almost inaudible. She took in the person before her, the photos hanging on the wall becoming the *second* most beautiful thing Ryuko had seen all night.

She was no older than Ryuko by about a year or so, tall and shapely with black silken hair cut in a stylish bob. Her features were devastatingly beautiful, sharp and stoic. What was most interesting to Ryuko, however, was the fact that the other girl was clearly asian or at least of asian descent, like herself. Her prodigious eyebrows shot up as she took Ryuko in, Ryuko once again feeling self-conscious about her clothes.

"Etto… ja, sie sind unglaublich." Ryuko answered with a nervous laugh, gesturing haphazardly at the wall behind her.

What seemed to be a knowing smile spread across the new girl's face.

"Sie sagte: 'etto'… ich denke, sie sind Japanisch?" The girl asked, Ryuko's heart skipping a beat. She couldn't help painting a massive smile across her features as she clutched her camera hanging from its neck-strap ever tighter. The other girl's features lit up as well, another small giggle escaping her lips.

"I knew that might give me away…" Ryuko said in Japanese, rubbing the back of her head sheepishly.

"I'm glad it did. Having someone else to speak my mother tongue with is… very comforting." The girl answered, her Japanese even more beautiful and perfect than her German.

"Satsuki." She said, extending a slender hand.

"Oh, uh… I'm Ryuko. Nice to meetcha." Ryuko answered, taking her hand and shaking only a little too vigorously.

"Ryuko. I like that name, very uncommon. So tell me Ryuko, are you a photographer?" Satsuki said, gesturing at the camera hanging from Ryuko's neck.

"Oh, this? Um, well… aspiring, I guess. Though nothing I've taken is *this* good." Ryuko answered, turning once again to gesture at the photos on the wall. Satsuki moved to join her, sipping a drink in one hand between snippets of conversation.

"The Germans call this 'Schwarz-Weiß'. I've always been drawn to it. Do you shoot in black and white at all?" Satsuki said, looking down towards Ryuko and cocking a large eyebrow.

"Well, that's pretty much all I shoot in actually…" Ryuko responded with another awkward chuckle, this time louder and more lubricated by drink.

They talked for what seemed to Ryuko like hours, making their way around the party amusing the guests with their foreign tongue and even more foreign good looks, before donning their coats and making their way outside to walk through the bitter winter's air, warmed by the drink in their bellies and the cigarettes between their lips. Ryuko felt but a pauper beside Satsuki with her long, fashionable navy overcoat and western hairstyle as Ryuko's drab coat and unkempt hair blew in the winter's wind.

Satsuki didn't seem to mind though, and as they stopped to rest on a small street corner, Satsuki held her eyes for just a little bit too long as Ryuko lit her a fresh cigarette and blocked the wind, her hand lightly brushing against Satsuki's soft cheek. Ryuko's heart fluttered.

She had to stand on her tiptoes to kiss Satsuki, but in the end it felt perfectly natural. The taste of cigarette smoke and a litany of alcohols mixed in their mouths, and in a fell swoop Ryuko's first kiss was stolen by the most beautiful girl she would ever see.

It was perfect.

After it was over, Ryuko stepped back on the sidewalk, bringing her camera to her eye, adjusting the light meter and focusing the lens. The bright white of the full moon shone from behind her and lit Satsuki in a ghostly light that was as perfect as the embrace they had just shared. The lit cigarette dangled from Satsuki's mouth as she smiled a small smile, looking slightly away from center as if she expected this to happen all along.

The shutter clicked, and somewhere far off a clock tower began to ring. Ryuko's heart sunk. Checking her watch, she realized it was already two. She was late. If she screwed this up she would be stuck in West Berlin illegally, and as much as the prospect of staying here with Satsuki was enticing, she couldn't leave her surrogate sister Mako and the rest of the family behind.

"Listen, Satsuki… I gotta go." Ryuko said urgently, the sadness clear in her voice. Satsuki's expression turned from bemusement just moments before to disappointment.

"I understand. I'm… glad I met you, Ryuko." She said sadly. Ryuko reached up to plant a soft kiss on her cheek, before running vigorously in the direction of the wall checkpoint that she had begun her night at.

"Ryuko! Will I ever see you again?" Satsuki called after her. Ryuko turned, if only for a moment.

"You will, I promise!" She screamed earnestly before continuing her desperate sprint.

Ryuko thought there could have been tears in her eyes, but it was cold. It could've just been the wind.

Years later, when the Wall fell, Ryuko had returned to the neighborhood where she had had her fateful adventure. She strolled along the same streets her and Satsuki had strolled along, talking

about photography, music, Japan, everything; all those years ago. She found the exact street corner where Satsuki had taken her first kiss, Ryuko gladly giving it away.

Ryuko never had any illusions of finding Satsuki again, it had been too long and Satsuki was an exchange student anyways. She undoubtedly had returned to Japan, moving on to bigger and better things, forgetting about Ryuko.

That was fine with Ryuko, of course. She was glad to have shared that one night of adventure with her, even though Ryuko was sure it only felt like an adventure to herself.

The one regret she had was that she had *promised* . In a fit of desperation where she had only a singular goal to return home, Ryuko had made a promise that she knew full well she would never be able to keep. Despite what her upbringing said about promises being sacred, Ryuko supposed that in the end, life was such that promises were indeed made to be broken, and this was no exception.

Smiling sadly, Ryuko reached into her coat pocket, sitting on a bench near that quiet street corner and pulling out the picture she had taken that night many years ago. In black and white, a beautiful girl with sharp features is framed by the white light of the moon, a cigarette dangling from a mouth graced by the smallest of smiles. She would always have this, at least.

As a far-off bell tower rang, Ryuko thought there could be tears in her eyes.

But it was cold, it could have just been the wind.